



CONNECTICUT LEGAL SERVICES

A PRIVATE NONPROFIT CORPORATION

SHIRLEY BERGERT, DIRECTOR, PUBLIC BENEFITS TASK FORCE

872 MAIN STREET P.O. BOX 258 WILLIMANTIC, CT 06226-258

TELEPHONE (860) 456-1761 EXT. 115 OR 1-800-413-7796 (CLIENT TOLL-FREE LINE)

FAX (860) 456-7420

E-MAIL SBERGERT@CONNLEGALSERVICES.ORG

SHIRLEY BERGERT

DIRECTOR OF

PUBLIC BENEFITS TASK FORCE

ANNE LOUISE BLANCHARD

LITIGATION DIRECTOR

CATHERINE CUSHMAN

CHERYL DIANE FEUERMAN

BET GAILOR

JOELEN J. GATES

REBECCA LOOS

SAMUEL T.D. NEVES, JR.

ROYAL STARK

WENDY W. WANCHAK

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

CAROLE MASTERS

VOLUNTEER ATTORNEY

LAUREL J. FREEMAN

PARALEGAL

THOMAS W. CRATTY, JR.

VOLUNTEER PARALEGAL

LUZ OSUBA

HEROILDA RIOS

LEGAL ASSISTANTS

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

62 WASHINGTON STREET

MIDDLETOWN, CT 06457

(860) 344-0447

THOMAS D. GOLDBERG

BOARD CHAIR

STEVEN D. EPPER-EPSTEIN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

LAW OFFICES

211 STATE STREET

BRIDGEPORT, CT 06604

16 MAIN STREET

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153 WILLIAMS STREET

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20 SUMMER STREET

STAMFORD, CT 06901

85 CENTRAL AVENUE

WATERBURY, CT 06702

872 MAIN STREET

WILLIMANTIC, CT 06226

SATELLITE OFFICES

5 COLONY STREET

MERIDEN, CT 06451

62 WASHINGTON STREET

MIDDLETOWN, CT 06457

98 SOUTH MAIN STREET

SOUTH NORWALK, CT 06854

564 PROSPECT STREET

TORRINGTON, CT 06790

29 NAEK ROAD, SUITE 5A

ROCKVILLE, CT 06066

The Importance of Low Income Utility Rate Development

Public Information Hearing Regarding Low Income Resident Access to Necessary
Utility Services

Hosted by Operation Fuel

Statement of Shirley Bergert¹

January 10, 2011

The Low Income Energy Advisory Board (LIEAB) has put significant effort into developing approaches to overcome obstacles low income households face accessing essential energy services. In support of LIEAB's efforts, Operation Fuel retained one of the foremost national consultants to evaluate the affordability gap for these services and to help develop options: Roger Colton. Out of these efforts, a low income utility rate emerged as a partial resolution to make utility service more affordable. ***We support development of a low income utility rate at a level that makes essential services affordable to low income households.***

The DPUC has authority to develop a rate structure that removes an undue burdens on persons of poverty status and takes their indigency into account (CGS sec. 16-19e(b)). It has not taken action absent additional direction from the legislature. Because of the importance of the utility rate structure in removing barriers to accessing essential utility service, the DPUC is an appropriate forum for undertaking a more comprehensive evaluation of the coordination and design of the array of assistance programs and policies which address aspects of energy access, involving several state agencies. The goal should be to ensure low income households can readily access a coordinated package of assistance that maximizes affordability, including an affordable utility rate. These programs and policies include, but are not limited to:

- energy assistance (DSS),
- weatherization assistance (DSS, CT Energy Efficiency Fund and DPUC),
- tenant options to install conservation measures and housing code enforcement (CT statutes),
- utility payment programs including arrearage forgiveness programs, and below budget payment options (DPUC), and

¹ Member of the Low Income Energy Advisory Board, the Energy Conservation Management Board, the Fuel Oil Conservation Board, and the Advisory Board of the Institute for Sustainable Energy.



- creative purchase of generation to reduce costs to low income households, (*e.g.*, electricity purchasing pool OPM oversees for state facilities that is required to, but does not, offer the benefits to low income households – CGS sec. 16a-14e).

The current situation is not tenable. From my work on various boards and in a range of forums, it is apparent the utility companies see the need for change and have staff willing to work creatively to address the complex problems. I believe the various agencies involved, including state agencies and contractors, and social service providers, as well as other interest groups, would also welcome the opportunity to address the issues in a comprehensive, intelligent way. While a perfect solution may prove elusive, we have an opportunity to make great strides.